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# On the New Team

Robert William Komer

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President Johnson's appointment of Robert W. Komer as, in effect, the No. 2 American official in Saigon has given him a man on the scene whose style and outlook are much in tune with his own.

Like the President, Mr. Komer is a man of enormous energy, enthusiasm, and optimism. Impatient with the endless subtleties

of State Department diplomacy, eager to make decisions, he is also good at defending them once they are made. "This is a very, very bright boy who likes to move," one of his long-time associates said today.

Moreover, Mr. Komer shares Mr. Johnson's conviction that the war in Vietnam is very much a war on two fronts, and that military success must be matched by equal strides on the nonmilitary side—the peaceful reconstruction of Vietnam. In Saigon he will be in charge of United States operations dealing with the economic, social and political reconstruction of the country.

The nonmilitary side of the war has been the main preoccupation of this athletic, 5-foot 10-inch former intelligence specialist ever since Mr. Johnson, last March, named him to a post that carried the formal title of Special Assistant to the President for Peaceful Reconstruction in Vietnam.

## 'Blowtorch' in Vietnam

The job covered a multitude of assignments, and in tackling them Mr. Komer earned a reputation as the White House's "blowtorch" in Vietnam, pressing for ever greater and faster efforts in pacifying the hostile countryside, controlling the nation's distorted and highly inflationary economy, and steering it toward constitutional government.

Mr. Komer's exuberance, his anxiety to achieve results, and his considerable capacity for action have won him admiration and respect in Washington but more than a few critics in the American mission in Saigon. During his many visits to South Vietnam in recent months he has displayed enormous curiosity and diligence, but some officials have complained that his reports to the President on nonmilitary progress have been marked by unjustifiable optimism.

"Komer will find out that Saigon isn't Washington," one senior embassy official was quoted as having said last week.

But if Mr. Komer finds that the obstacles to reconstruction seem greater from Saigon than they do from the capital, he is at least being handed a first-class opportunity to do something about them. For he will have a good deal of authority in Saigon.

"Up to now he's always been a staff officer," a friend remarked today. "Now he has line command. It will be a novel test for him."

No stranger to the inner councils of the White House, Mr. Komer served for five years as deputy to McGeorge Bundy, who was Special Assistant for National Security Affairs to both President Kennedy and Mr. Johnson and is now president of the Ford Foundation.

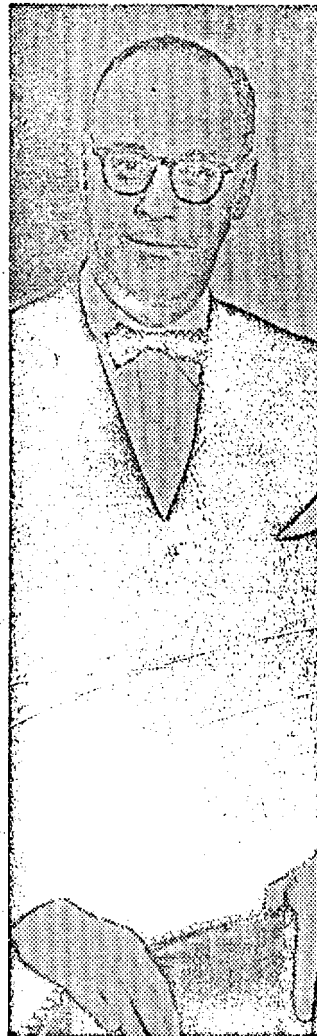
In some ways the two were much alike. Each has a quick dry wit, an extraordinarily lively mind and a distaste for sophistry and fools.

## Intelligence Officer in War

A Chicagoan, Mr. Komer trained at the Army combat intelligence school in World War II and served with Army intelligence in Italy.

He joined the Central Intelligence Agency in 1947 after having earned a master's degree at Harvard's School of Business Administration, and remained with the C.I.A. until he joined the Bundy staff in 1961.

Mr. Komer served in the



Will be very much his own boss in Saigon.

analytical rather than operational side of the C.I.A., and left in part because the nature of his work—in essence that of an intelligence adviser—inhibited him from making policy decisions.

In the closely knit "Little State Department" created by Mr. Kennedy and run by Mr. Bundy, Mr. Komer kept a sharp eye on parts of South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa. "He was Mr. It from Casablanca to New Guinea," a former colleague recalls.

## Key Role in Yemen Crisis

Mr. Komer played a key role in the Yemen crisis in early 1963. Partly at his urging, the Administration recognized the revolutionary regime in the hope that recognition would stabilize the bizarre politics of the Middle East and bring about a more moderate government in that country.

The move created considerable confusion and dismay among the pro-Western monarchies of the Middle East, and appeared to encourage rather than neutralize the aggrandizing instincts of President Gamal Abdel Nasser of the United Arab Republic. Soon—much to Mr. Komer's dismay—President Kennedy was wryly referring to it as "Komer's war."

Mr. Komer recalls that he first came to Mr. Johnson's attention when he was assigned by Mr. Kennedy to accompany the then Vice President on a tour of the Middle East in 1962. Mr. Johnson was later impressed by the key role Mr. Komer played in helping to soften the dispute between India and Pakistan over Kashmir.

The official lives in Lake Barcroft, in nearby Virginia, with his wife, the former Geraldine Peplin of Cleveland, and children by a former marriage—Douglas, 17, Richard, 14, and Anne, 12.

Trim and athletic at 45, he tries hard to keep in shape. He is an avid tennis player, ice skater and swimmer, and when the weather is warm, he and his wife try to get in a swim daily before work. He occasionally jogs from the White House to lunch at the Federal City Club, and takes his steps two at a time afterwards.

His favorite hobby is cooking, at which he is an acknowledged master with a strong penchant for highly seasoned foods and a love for Chinese delicacies.